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CONCERNING SHAKESPEARE.

IN this age of ingenuity and invention the domains of discovery and research are the hunting grounds of the scientist and the explorer. In the interest of science and the pursuit of truth, no ground is too sacred for exploration, no theory too venerable or cherished for the detention of the evolutionist. The age of reason is restored, but with method, this time, in its madness. The true is sought in the concrete, and new beliefs are substituted for older faiths. History is being rewritten by a race of writers brilliant in style and fearless in the pursuit of truth as supported by knowledge. The geologist has called the great globe itself to testify to the truth of his theories, the naturalist has compelled the dryad and the naiad, from their evasive existences, to yield up their secrets to the evidences of their physical construction, and, deep down in the atom and the protoplasm, man searches for the cause which shall unsettle forever his hitherto unquestioned belief. The arc of this theory embraces the five senses, and is perfect within that radius ;—beyond, all that we feel but cannot prove, is false and untrustworthy ; analyze, prove, and believe ; theorize, with the soul's uplifted, inexpressible aspiration of faith, and you are lost. The pioneers in this new movement were great, earnest, wise men, who, loving nature with a child's love, sought to fathom her great secrets with a reverent curiosity. Tolerant and indulgent themselves, they undermined the veneration for old doctrines without advocating universal ruin or entire unbelief. Pursuing the path of their research with determined steps, applying the torch to every cranny of the tortuous path, they have yet held by that cord of tradition and memory to which inheritance attached them, and thus into the bowels of the earth they drag at each remove a lengthening chain.

In seeking for Nature's source through all its physical structure they have yet looked reverently upward unto Nature's God.

The value of their labors who shall calculate? The glory of their discoveries who will decry? But light is not always clearness: it is only to the eye of the crowned one that the full orb of day is bearable. The same heat which sustains and revives will as easily destroy, and the torch which, in skillful hands, may lead a Darwin or a Tyndall into safety, may prove only an *ignis fatuus* to the ignorant follower. Reverence and Wisdom are not unworthy guides, and he who seeks for truth in Nature will never wisely abandon his awe for the Creator. Fools only rush in where angels fear to tread. Literature has partaken of the analytical spirit of the age. Ingenuity is substituted for fancy. That which was once deemed not the less true for being, like our existence itself, awful and inexpressible, save in symbols, must have its lawful credentials or fall in contempt as useless fable. The poet whose supersensitive ear was once held to have caught the warmest pulsations of the great heart of Nature, is now discredited, and he must bring us the ocular proof, or else be, like Iago, damned. By this rule Browning is abstract and Tennyson a word painter. "The Psalm of Life," the "Building of the Ship," and the "Song of the Blacksmith," are Longfellow's best gifts to man, while rhythm is only a pleasing echo to the sense. The result is obvious. It is easier to destroy than to create. The writer has educated his reader, and a whole book full of fact-seekers has produced a world full of fact-lovers. It is so much easier for common minds to measure a fact than to entertain a fancy, that it is no wonder to see Pegasus toiling before a baggage wagon. Thus, the scientist who found sacred devotion and old faith in the way of his discovery, and yet pushed on regardless of their destruction, has unintentionally been the forerunner of the iconoclast in all the cathedrals of our lives. Omar has outstripped the Christian. The *first* destroyer of a text burnt only those volumes which ran counter to his faith; the Mahomedans applied the torch to the very source and citadel of all knowledge; Huxley, Darwin, and Tyndall have proved forerunners of a literature which has all imaginative and spiritual nature for its field and blind irreverence for its guide. To pursue an original and ingenious theory to its logical conclusion, to refine analysis to a needless point, to be euphemistic in idea as well as in speech, is a fine art. Let the evolutionist overturn faith in the pursuit of a First Cause, his followers will gratify the spirit of the age in the ingenious undermining

of a reputation long established, or the destruction of a belief too sweet and sacred to be idly questioned. The pioneer is outstripped by his disciple. The betrayer of the Saviour becomes a patriot and dies a martyr to a sincere belief. The songs of Homer, too great to be the work of one, become the easy pastime of many.

Belisarius is no longer an unkinged beggar, exciting our pity and teaching a wise truth ; and the wisest, greatest, meanest of mankind becomes the author of the immortal works of a *ci-devant* William Shakespeare. The force of reason could no further go.

This is what seems to be the truth, or has seemed so, for over two centuries and a half. In the year 1564, in the town of Stratford-on-Avon, England, was born a child who was named William Shakespeare. His place of birth, parentage, and many incidents of the domestic life of his family, are well attested. Many incidents of his early boyhood, favorable and otherwise, are also well proven. His early marriage with a lady older than himself, his departure for London, and his arrival there, are not to be gainsaid. We know positively that he became an actor in London ; a companion and partner in theatrical enterprises with other men, and whose labors are not denied by contemporaries as of a value increasing year by year. Of his usefulness to the corporation to which he belonged, there is ample proof in the substantial fortune which he accumulated, and in the enlargement of the circle of his enterprises. Contemporary writers extol his genius as a play-writer while living ; and, in the maturity of his years and powers, he retires to his native town ; becomes the largest landed proprietor in the place ; dies there in the full possession of his faculties in 1616 ; is buried in the picturesque church of his native town, under its very altar—the most honorable and conspicuous place in that temple ; and over his grave his widow surviving him causes to be placed a copy of his features, and some touching allusions to his worth. In 1623, two of his surviving partners, fellow actors and managers, venerating his genius, and wishing that his labor should not be lost, collected from the acting copies in the theatre library, from quarters stolen or badly printed, his works, edited them in their poor way, and commended these “trifles” to posterity, in the timid hope that the applause of contemporary audiences might find an echo in the enduring admiration of other ages. A contemporary poet, who was

also a fellow actor, "rare old Ben" Jonson, in lines immortal, bequeathed the portrait of his rival to posterity, and seemed to entertain no doubt that even his small Latin and less Greek would not invalidate the poetical claims of his friend William Shakespeare. These are things that we know, and can lay our hands upon as proofs. Other confirming facts concur in testimony, as well in the sonnets as in the plays, and in the words of rivals and contemporaries. To sum up all, we may declare that we know of a man, William Shakespeare by name, born as above, moving to London as above, and writing and working there; dying as above, and being so spoken of and written about; and whose surviving works were collected, edited, and published by his fellow-actors, and given in type to the public which had known and applauded their author. What follows? For two centuries these works have been the study of the wise, the resource and delight of the scholar, and the growing solace of the people. Whole libraries have been written to clear up doubtful meanings in the text.

Annotators and commentators have reached enduring fame in companionship with this "nature's child," and criticism has halted with reverence at the door which bears that immortal name. All nations have striven to make the plays of Shakespeare the text book of their scholars, and all the boundaries of nationality have been obliterated to naturalize this universal genius. His characters have passed into realities, as life-like and true as if they had indeed lived, breathed, and had their being. He has created symbols and characterized traits. He has so dealt with the great passions of human nature that his men and woman are emblems. A whole gallery of his portraits would be the fac-similes of our world, and a catalogue of his passions would begin and end with all that the heart has ever felt. With small Latin and less Greek he has created a vocabulary by whose side only one volume may be placed—the Bible. Confined within the watery band which clasps green England, his far-reaching vision overlooked her boundaries and saw his fellow-man as he lived in all lands. Ignorant of mere geographical outlines, his knowledge and measurement of the human heart and its wide range of emotions, was perfect and true. Untaught, perhaps, in that technical learning which makes more pedants than scholars, his marvelous vision penetrated deep into life's mystery, and his feeling heart

did the rest. Clear-minded and sane himself, he saw into the half disturbed soul of the Royal Dane; into the "overturned vase of the mind of the fair Ophelia," and scaled the heights where uncrowned Lear forsook his reason and foreswore his kind. History in his hands becomes personified narrative, and the Kings and Queens, the noble and churl, the peasant and the dame of his own land, passed by his clear sight, and moved life-like into the field of his recording fancy, there to exist forever. His creations stand breast-high with those of the Old and New Testaments, and when we have torn from the writers of the Bible their Moses, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes, their evangelists and teachings of the sacred text, we may then, and then only, be ready to deny his Hamlet and his Lear, his tender Imogen and moralizing Jaques, his gallery of Romans and the star-eyed Egyptian, to the "poor player" who lived and died, was buried, and who has come down to us as William Shakespeare.

Now, after two centuries and a half of this belief, we are called upon to reject, not the estimate which time has only deepened as to the works themselves, but the authenticity of their authorship. The poems, sonnets, and plays, now passing as the works of Shakespeare, were not his work at all!

In support of this theory, which is the seed-ground of many others, born of and growing out of it, we are offered conjectural negatives and distorted facts. It is necessary, in the first place, to declare that the plays and poems in question could not have been the work of Shakespeare, because of his place of birth, his condition in life, and of his scanty learning. The necessity of sustaining this point precedes the search for the true author of the works. How are we to believe that a lad born in an obscure village of England, of poor parentage, and with scanty opportunities of obtaining an education, could ever have written these sublime works? Could a person so born and educated, a poor player, have given us the only true glimpse of the early days of the Roman Republic, as well as those of its highest glory, and by his marvelous reproduction of the very men themselves, moving, speaking, and eating, have dwarfed all so-called history of those eras? Could a man who had small Latin and less Greek traverse the fields of legend and story in the Greek and Italian biography, and present us with a gallery of their portraits, as true and accurate as if he were a Phidias or a Raphael, and had truly

copied features which he bodily saw? Could a poor lad who had been detected in deer killing in his little village, and been banished from the place when his condition was so poor, ever have looked into the homes of the high-placed and lived for us the lives of kings and queens as if he were one of their order? Illustrations which were taken from the older classics, metaphors with local application borrowed from the records of dead empires; technicalities of arts and callings, learned and scientific terms, definitions in dead and living tongues—these the appliances only of the graduate or the pedant, could never have been the heritage of the actor at the Globe. Whoever was the author of the plays, it was certainly not he.

“ He might have been a Rooshan,
A German, French, or Prooshan,
But not a Stratford man.”

When it can be proved that it is only the scholar and the antiquarian who give us our works of Shakespeare and kindred blessings, we shall not only have corrected history, but we shall have acquired a new debt which ought to be repaid. It might almost be maintained, however, that in the domain of literature in which we are now traveling, in the region of creative literature, simple learning and technical attainments have never yet laid us under any obligation whatever. If the author or authors of the first great epic, and the greatest (for the Shakespearean myth has a counterpart here at the dawn of learning) were a university graduate, or a man of place or parts, we have no record of it, no note of the college which claimed him, of the nobility of which he was a member. The creator and founder of the Greek language was a minnesinger, whose blindness of sight did not dim the glories of that inward vision, which penetrated the hearts of men and spoke the history and romance of the land whence Delos rose and Phœbus sprung.

Was it a scholar and noble who, from a cart's tail, before a multitude of listeners, dramatized the belief of a nation, and by his own creative genius gave vitality and clearness to the story of Prometheus? When Solon stood in simple amazement amidst the audience of Thespis did he recognize in the founder of the Greek drama one of his own august order? History is strangely silent here. Coming into the era when biography and history are au-

thentic one may ask, did Socrates and Plato ever seek to claim the honors of the drama from the hands of less philosophic writers ? We are not curious as to the literary acquirements or the social standing of Eschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, the fathers of tragedy, but certainly Plato never claimed the authorship of their plays on the score of his philosophical wisdom, nor has that honor been awarded him. The tragedies of the Greeks were written by men who were actors or managers, and no fragments of a tragedy, no contemporary note of any lost work, disproves this fact. The Roman drama being only a faint copy or theft of the Greek, need not be mentioned here. Terence was only a half menander. The works of the French dramatists in the golden age of Louis, which have a hold on posterity, are those which a poor actor and dramatist created while building the walls of the only temple which stands to-day unharmed by time in France,—the House of Moliere ; while the plays of the scholarly Racine and Corneille remain monuments of the beauty of language, indeed, before which, as such, all scholars will reverently bend on their way to the temple where the human beings of Moliere live, move, and have their being. In fine, if this hypothesis must be taken as argument, scarcely a reputation of the contemporaries of Shakespeare may hope to escape. The language of Chaucer and of Spenser was the armory of Marlowe, and of Jonson, as well as of the woollen-draper's son ; and while the brightest Latin and Greek scholar of his day—and an actor, too—gave us the Alchemist and other learned dialogues, the drunken youth who died in a brawl on the confines of manhood left us, in Marlowe's mighty line, a foretaste of what was coming soon in the native wood notes wild of Nature's child. We are told that in one of the chronicles of the time, which carries down the names of worthies of the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare is not even mentioned, and that such an omission is as significant as if a biography of the writers of the Victorian era were published with Alfred Tennyson's name omitted. When it can be shown that contemporary writers of any era are quick to recognize the higher genius of a fellow-worker, we may accept this statement as argument, but in fact it is no proof at all. It is not necessary to show that Shakespeare held, as an author, among the non-theatre goers of his time, the secure place which he now holds, although it could easily be done. His works were unpublished, save over the lights of the stage. His calling was

degraded in the eyes of many of the literary class, and it would be curious indeed to have his claims allowed by such contemporaries as Sir Thomas Browne or Robert Greene. The case of Tennyson is no parallel, the age of Victoria no counterpart to those environments which surrounded the actor-dramatist in the age of Elizabeth at the seething time of Puritanism. Contemporary mention is abundant, but the authors of the new theory must cast discredit upon it wherever found. The praises of Jonson and of Spenser, the slurs of Greene, the love of Southampton, and the not too remote mention of Milton are cast aside as either specious aids to the fraud which was being practiced, or as ignorant testimonies to a fame built upon lies. The genius of invention, however, is exhausted in the elaborate theories as to identity, which the sonnets are forced to contribute, and here the Baconian theory reaches its last ground of proof. It is declared that Bacon is proved to be the author of the Shakespeare plays by the evidence which lies in these sonnets, and line by line the patient theorist seeks out new aids to his argument. Lines which seem quite innocent and impersonal become, under this minute inspection and original application, clear evidences of Baconian craft. It is shown that at one time he held that his life was in danger, and the lament of a lover for the loss of his mistress's love is the warning cry which the endangered statesman utters in the tender folds of a sonnet. Without pursuing this theme to a tedious limit, it may be said of it, that its authors claim that Bacon wrote the Shakespeare plays, or many of them, and the sonnets, and was ashamed to own them.

We are asked to believe that this great man not only allowed his greatest works to pass before the audiences of his time, of which they were the delight and pride, unclaimed, but that, when the alleged author was dead, he quietly looked on while an edition of those plays was given to the world by the fellow-actors of the dead Shakespeare, and made no sign ; nor did he leave any record or claim in his papers at his death. It would seem that the answer of Macaulay to this Baconian theory had already been overlooked or forgotten. He declared that, even if there were any excuse when he upheld the empire in the exercise of his great office, why he should disown the dramatic works of his creation, there came a time, not far off, when, disgraced from office, mulcted in a heavy fine, driven from the Court, and only allowed to live by the

clemency of a nation which had not forgotten his great gifts, the declaration that he was the true author of the great plays already the popular delight of the English nation, would have raised him again in popular favor, and regained for him some of the glory which he had forever lost. He died and made no sign. Finally, he bequeathed to his own generation his ephemeral dramatic works, under a fraudulent paternity in the vulgar language of his own countrymen—the language of Chaucer and of Spenser, of Raleigh and of Marlowe, consigning his moral treatise to a certain immortality in the studied garb of a dead language. In this regard, at least, he seems not the wisest or greatest of mankind.

To conclude, if it be true that Poets are born, not made, it may as truly be said that Dramatists are born and grow. In that glorious age of Elizabeth, many royal Poets were born whose lines will remain imperishable in our literature. Shakespeare, the Poet, was one of these. The heart of England gave him birth; the Valley of the Avon, with its surpassing loveliness of field, hill, and shade, was the natural cradle of a poet. He drank in, with his earliest inspiration, all the influences of that beautiful land; the mysterious deep shadows of an English forest quickened his fervid imagination to people its depths; the placid stream along whose flowery banks his childish footsteps strayed gave calm and peace to the tempest in his fiery soul, while the glorious records of his country's splendor lay unfolded to him at one of its brightest pages, in neighboring Kenilworth and Warwick. The internecine wars of a century were giving way to a season of prosperity and calm. A new world was opening to the enterprise of man, a vast field of novel experiences enlarging and expanding the area of knowledge. That hour had come in a nation's life which contained the seeds of genius in the arts and sciences over the earth, an interval of awakening to all that is vast and noble, in thought and deed. An effete language was giving way before a living tongue. And again, as out of many jargons grew the polished Greek, the rude utterances of a semi-barbarian nation fashioned its own imperishable language, and, through the drama, forced the channel of poetic aspiration. Into this new spirit many gifted Poets poured their cherished thoughts. But it was given to but one in that age to melt the jewels of the mind in the crucible of the dramatist. His early experience at Stratford, whence many of his fellow

players also came ; the fact that the stage was the one open and lucrative road to fame and wealth for the poet as well as the playwright in that day, and the instinct which led the young Stratford friend of Burbage and Greene to their theatre on his arrival in London to seek his fortune—all these facts lead us up to the time when his own first play was produced. It must have been after he had gained a practical knowledge of the stage requirements by the duties of an actor, and the sequence of the plays themselves denotes the growth of this mechanical handicraft which was soon to fashion the immortal dramas bearing his name. The plays, by contract, passed out of the author's hands into those of the company which managed the theatre, and were no longer his own personal property. Hence, when his will was made, he had no such property to devise. All the published copies of the plays in his lifetime, and even until the Folio of 1623 appeared, were either pirated from the parts of the actors for a small sum, or taken down in shorthand during performances. The same indifference, if such it may be called, may be laid to the charge of Lord Bacon, who in his will devised his papers to Constable without specifying these plays, and no such precious manuscripts have yet emerged from that source.

He thus addresses the Bishop of Lincoln : "I find that the ancients, as Cicero, Demosthenes, Plinus and others, have presented both their orations and epistles. I have done the like to my own, which I will not publish while I live, but I have been bold to bequeath them to your Lordship and Mr. Chancellor of the Duchy." In accepting the trust, the Reverend Bishop, while doing justice to Bacon's oratorical powers, plainly intimates that his fame would not be raised by the publication of his letters, a criticism in which Lord Campbell, who quotes the above in his "*Lives of the Chancellors*," published in 1849, entirely concurs, and still further says : "They are written in a stiff, formal, ungraceful style, and when the writer tries to be light and airy, we have such a botch as might have been expected if Horace Walpole had been condemned to write the *Novum Organum*." Lord Campbell further says : "He wrote some religious tracts, and he employed himself in a metrical translation into English of the Psalms of David, showing by this effort, it must be confessed, more piety than poetry ; his ear had not been formed, nor his fancy fed, by a perusal of the divine productions of Surrey, Walls,

Spenser, and Shakespeare, or he could not have produced rhymes so rugged, and turns of expression so mean. Few poets deal in finer imagery than is to be found in the writings of Bacon, but if his prose is sometimes poetical his poetry is always prosaic."

The sonnets and many of the plays were republished after the death of Shakespeare with his name unusually prominent, as an indication that the value of the work had been enhanced by the repute of the author; and while this so-called imposture was being practiced, Bacon was silently enduring the ignominy of his recent punishment for crimes which a whole nation would have condoned could he have proclaimed his authorship of these remarkable plays.

It is necessary, in order to sustain this Baconian theory, to prove not only that Shakespeare was an impostor, but that all about him were knaves or fools. Ben Jonson becomes a lying panegyrist, and in vile collusion with a poor player, to shield the virtuous Bacon from immortality and wealth, and he plays his part so ill that his posterity refuses to believe that the author of the dedication of the print in the Folio of 1623 was other than what he seemed to be. The friendship of Southampton for Shakespeare is denied in the face of the early dedication of the *Venus and Adonis*, in face of the pretty well authenticated gift of one thousand pounds to his friend upon the building of the Globe Theatre, and of the absolutely proved interest which he and Lord Rutland took in all matters relating to the theatre. The attempt to unite Bacon with Lord Southampton in friendship is a violation of decency, especially at any time of his life subsequent to the death of his friend and relative, Essex; whose trial and condemnation were the infamy of that Bacon who owed his public advancement to his bounty, and whose conduct, both at the trial and after the grave had closed upon the unfortunate Earl, has drawn down upon the Philosopher's head that withering denunciation of Lord Macaulay which will cling to Bacon when the Shakespeare myth shall have been forgotten. There is no ingenuity of reasoning by which the life work and career of Bacon is associated with these plays which cannot be more sensibly and clearly used in favor of the reputed author. Scholarships do not make Dramatists. Colleges do not create Poets. They have so often burst the environments of poverty, seclusion, ignorance, low birth, that we are tempted to believe that only such surroundings

can suffice to release the sublime spirit of creation. The very defects of the Shakespearean verse would be the dishonor of the accurate collegians. Mixed metaphors, false quantities, strained geographical and ethical allusions, anachronisms of all kinds, which would disgrace a merely well read or educated man, abound in all the pages of the text. Shakespeare was a dramatist, making plays. He was consciously doing this with the greatest gift for his work the world has any note of. He was, at the same time, it may be unconsciously, fashioning a literature by which his claim to the originality of his dramatic work would one day be invalidated. He not only fashioned the statue; he was called upon at once, also, to make the tools with which he labored. But, like all unconscious laborers, he did this with so little effort, he used the language in which he wrote with such indifferent facility, that to an age of mere word users, to whom the style is more important than the thing, he seems an anomaly. When God had given us such a Dramatist, it was an easy task to make him speak. The soul which could contain the image of Lear in the storm, or Hamlet on the rack, would soon find a voice to utter its sublime conceptions.

Finally, while it is not necessary that one must be a good or a sober man to have done great work for mankind, even here the comparison between Bacon and Shakespeare is in favor of the actor. No such infamous life has been lived in the world's history as that of Bacon, when one considers his gifts and his surroundings. The son of the most learned woman of her day, in an age when learning was uncommon among her sex, and of a Lord-keeper who stood high in the favor of the wise Elizabeth; connected by blood with Burleigh and by rank and genius with all the ruling spirits of his time, educated beyond denial above any scholar of that age of scholars, it is yet proved that his whole public career was infamous. False to Essex, false to his great office as Chancellor, the last English jurist who favored torture, who took bribes from plaintiff and defendant alike, and whose character was not redeemed by the excuse that he was amiably weak enough to have any but colossal vices, a lover of fame and money, the "meanest of mankind," he yet, when disgraced and outlawed, poor and friendless, saw, undisturbed, the great fame of his conceded works, the profit of them also, pass into the hands of a despised play actor, and made no sign. Nothing but his immortal writings could redeem such a character from immortal

contempt. No need now to picture to this age the portrait of that Shakespeare whose frailties, even, are forgiven in the effulgent light of his royal gifts to mankind. His life was so lived that it gave no sign. We may catch a glimpse of a heavenly smile when playfully recreating at the Mermaid with Raleigh and Jonson and that immortal Table Round, or we may see him in his native place, the wise husbandman, the good citizen, taking care of the few years between himself and the grave. That is all. For his enduring likeness, find it in the plays themselves, in the beneficence of that gift which lays the world under contribution, and yet claims no reward.

One other such life we know of. Across the channel, in the days of the fourteenth Louis, a poor player comes to the barrier of Paris with his country company. He begs his way into the fair metropolis, is denied to practice his calling there, while royal patronage fosters a more aristocratic association. Like another Thespis, he presents his portraits under despised surroundings. But the fame of them penetrates where their author cannot go. At last, by royal request, he not only enters the forbidden capitol, he has taken it by right of conquest. He exchanges the rage of Edgar for the robes of a king; he founds the most enduring Temple in France, becomes the author of a gallery of works imperishable while the language endures, is refused admission to the then infant Academy of Immortals, unless he will resign his vagabond calling; and, upon his refusal to make this sacrifice, for fear his poor boys and girls would starve, he is shunned by fashion, but favored by the Grand Monarch, who has a lien upon immortality for that act at least; and in the fullness of years, in harness upon the stage, in the pursuit of his duty, Moliere dies, leaving his fame as a dramatist to mankind, his name to the great House of Moliere which he founded, and his bust to the Academy of Immortals which rejected him when living. If not equal in achievement, there is at least great similarity in the lives of the two great actor-dramatists.

LAWRENCE BARRETT.